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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASMARA 000261

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/E; LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/07/2019

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SUBJECT: ISAIAS PUSHES ITALIAN GOVERNMENT FOR MORE
INVESTMENT; REITERATES FLAT DENIAL ON SOMALIA

Classified By: Amb. Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d)

11. (C) The Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director General for Sub-Saharan Africa, Giuseppe Morabito, visited Asmara the week of July 27. According to an Italian embassy source, Morabito obtained a last-minute meeting with President Isaias on Friday. The president made a strong push for greater Italian investment in Eritrea, citing the longstanding special relationship between the two countries. Isaias, in keeping with his policy of economic self-reliance, stressed that business investment is preferable to economic assistance. On political issues, the two talked very generally about Eritrea's role and agreed to start a dialogue on regional issues. On Somalia, Isaias clung to the Flat Denial and reiterated his view that Eritrea has a right to its own position on bringing peace and governance to Somalia. Both sides expressed the desire to "start talking more deeply." This was the first visit by a senior Italian official since 2006.

12. (C) The ambassador also met with Morabito on July 31. The ambassador described our efforts to reach out to Isaias and persuade him to abandon support for Somali extremists. Morabito asked if we had set preconditions for better relations. The ambassador replied that President Obama had expressed a desire for better relations, but in conversations with senior regime officials we had stressed that GSE support to al Shabaab was a barrier to that goal.

MCMULLEN